



THE CRAFTSMAN.

N^o 330. SATURDAY, OCT. 28, 1732.



Was fully apprized, when I first engaged myself in this Undertaking, that I should be obliged to encounter with great Opposition and many Difficulties in the Pursuit of it. I could easily foresee that *Men in Power*, who have the Disposition of *Employments* and *Rewards* in their Hands, would not want Advocates to defend their Measures; to put the most plausible Glosses on their Conduct, and endeavour to reconcile it to the general Principles of *Liberty*. But I own my Apprehensions went no farther; for it did not enter into my Thoughts that the very *first Principles of a free Government* would be disputed by Men, who call Themselves *Whigs*, and owe their Preferment to *those Principles*, however They might attempt to accommodate them to their own Purposes. I could not conceive that any Persons (especially of grave and solemn Characters) would prostitute Themselves so far as to plead openly for the Expediency of *Corruption* and *venal Dependency*; nor did

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did I imagine that the Establishment of *standing Armies* and a *general Excise* would ever find any Advocates in this Nation, under the present Government.

But Experience hath proved the contrary, and convinced us of the Truth of an old Observation, that when Men are embark'd in the Defence of a *bad Cause*, They must not stick at any Measures, or Topicks, to support it. One Thing naturally draws on another, and They are obliged to proceed from Step to Step, till They are driven at last to the Fountain-Head, and the *Constitution* itself becomes the Point in Debate.

The *Doctrines*, which I have just mention'd, have certainly this Tendency, and affect the fundamental Principles of our Government. That *such Doctrines* have been advanced and defended, is too notorious and melancholy a Truth; which makes it the Duty of every *Englishman* to prevent the Propagation and Establishment of them, as far as it lies in his Power.

The Subject of *Corruption* and *Court-Dependence* hath been pretty fully explain'd already, in the Course of these Papers; and will, perhaps, be resumed at a proper Juncture.

The Dangers of *standing Armies* and *Excises* have likewise been inculcated in general Terms; but they are Subjects of so much Importance to all that is dear and valuable to us, as a great, free and flourishing People, that they deserve and require a particular Examination.

I mention these *two Points* together, because I think them, in a great Measure, dependent on each other; for as a *large Army* cannot be supported, under our present Circumstances of *Debts* and *Expences*, without *burthensome Taxes* and *Impositions*, so it is evident from History that a *general Excise* can never be establish'd, without a *standing Army* to support it; and in these two Points consist the most terrible Ideas, which We can possibly form to our selves of *arbitrary Government*.

I shall

I shall begin with the Subject of *Excises*, and will endeavour to explain it in a Manner and Style adapted to the Capacities of all my Readers.

I chuse to enter upon this Subject at present, that it may be fully discuss'd before the Parliament meets. In this Point, at least, I shall conform myself to a Rule laid down by one of my *Adversaries*, who was formerly pleas'd to observe that the Examination of such national Points ought always to precede the *Session of Parliament*; and that every *Englishman* hath a Right, at those Times, to offer his Thoughts upon such Matters as may possibly come before *that Assembly*. I hope therefore that They will not revoke this Concession, but allow me to exercise a Privilege without putting any bad Constructions upon it, which They have acknowledged to be the Right of every *Englishman*.

I will not pretend to assert that any *Minister* hath actually resolv'd to propose *such a Scheme* as I am going to examine, or prepared the necessary Materials and Calculations for it; but as it may be too late to oppose it *without Doors*, when it is brought into the *House*, I think it proper to give my Reasons against it in Time, whilst I am not precluded by Authority; and promise to consider every Thing of Weight, that shall be urg'd on the *other Side*.

But though I do not aver that any *Minister* hath yet embraced *such a Scheme*, I will not dissemble my Apprehension that some *Projector* may have it in his Thoughts; and I will very frankly explain my Reasons for it, as a farther Justification of this Enquiry.

About a Year and an half ago We took Notice of a Rumour, that a *certain Gentleman* had projected a Scheme for substituting a *general Excise* in the Room of the *Land-Tax*; upon which Occasion We thought proper to give our Readers some Extracts from the Writings of Mr. *Hampton* upon that Subject. This Apprehension was treated with great Contempt by Mr. *Walingham*, who endeavour'd to ridicule it as a

false Alarm, a meer Bugbear of our own raising, in order to keep up the Spirit of Discontent; because the *Supplies for that Year* were already granted, and the Session was then drawing to an End. This deserved no Reply at that Time; for We only said that *such a Scheme* was on Foot, without designing to insinuate that it would be put in Execution that Year; yet the very next Session We saw it partly executed by reviving the *Excise upon Salt*, to make Way for the Reduction of *one Shilling in the Pound on Land*. When *this Project* came under the Consideration and Debate of Parliament, a *certain Gentleman* was pleased to promise the House that the *other Shilling on Land* should be likewise taken off, if They would consent to *some Alterations in the Collection of the Revenue*. By This He was generally understood to mean the Conversion of some *other Taxes* into *Excises*; and soon after, this Hint was explain'd to us more at large in a Pamphlet, intitled, *a Letter to a Freeholder on the Reduction of the Land-Tax*. As this Treatise was dispersed through the Kingdom by *ministerial Authority*, and must be supposed to contain the Sentiments of *Those*, in whose Service it was known to be written, I will transcribe a Passage or two from it, relating to the Subject now before us.

“ To scatter Terrors on this Occasion, *says He*,
 “ much Declamation hath been made Use of against
 “ a *general Excise*; as if the necessary Funds, to be
 “ provided in Ease of the *Land-Tax*, must introduce
 “ a *general Excise*. This the *Craftsman* hath raved
 “ at in Print, and his *Patrons* have not blush'd to do
 “ it in Places, where such Fallacies were not altogether so becomingly introduced. Every one knows
 “ that *those Taxes*, which publick Necessity hath laid
 “ upon the *Importation of Commodities*, have been the
 “ most grievous Burthen on the *British Commerce*. All
 “ *Home-Consumption* ought to be tax'd; but the Produce of our *Colonies*, brought hither, hath a vast
 “ Disadvan-

“ Disadvantage in paying Duty upon being landed,
“ and receiving Drawbacks on being exported. All
“ Goods imported are more or less subject to this
“ Grievance; and all Duties paid the Government on
“ Importation cost the Government 10 *per Cent.* for
“ prompt Payment. In many, if the Commodity be
“ enter’d for *Re-exportation* within a certain Time,
“ the Factor claims a *Drawback* of the intire Duty,
“ and thus the Præmium, which was allow’d Him
“ on *prompt Payment*, is absolutely and intirely lost to
“ the Publick; by which the Nation, as the *Customs*
“ now stand, actually loses 10 *per Cent.* on divers
“ Branches of our Commerce. Besides, the Charges of
“ *Commission*, &c. to the Planters and Merchants of our
“ *Colonies*, which They must allow their Factors here
“ for the Transaction of their Business at the *Custom-*
“ *house*, are a great Load upon their Trade.

“ Other Inconveniencies arise from the Duties being
“ paid on *Importation*, and *Drawbacks* allow’d on ex-
“ porting them again. Numberless Frauds are com-
“ mitted. The clandestine Running of Goods is greatly
“ encouraged by this Method; which if changed, the
“ People might be considerably eased, as well at home
“ as in our Colonies abroad. Who then will be the Suf-
“ ferer, or who will have Cause to complain against rea-
“ sonable Methods for improving the Revenue and easing
“ the People, by turning the most burthensome of the
“ *Customs* on Importation into *Excises* on Home-Con-
“ sumption? Our *Liberties* can be in no Danger from
“ such *Excises*. They may be as safe in *this Kingdom*
“ as in the Republick of *Holland*, under the same Re-
“ gulations; and none will be affected by this Altera-
“ tion but those little, mercenary *Factors*, who from the
“ Lust of Lucre would have these *Customs* continued
“ against the Interest of Trade, against the Ease of the
“ People, meerly that They may have the private Ad-
“ vantage of Præmiums on *prompt Payment*, and *Com-*
“ *missions* for transacting Business at the *Custom-house*.

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‘ But This, I am persuaded, will have so little Weight
 ‘ with the People of *England*, against their general Advan-
 ‘ tantage, that I rather believe They will despise the
 ‘ Clamours and reject the Persons of Those, who
 ‘ oppose a *common Good*, from any such sordid Motives;
 ‘ especially where there is not the least Thought of
 ‘ any *general Excise*, nor any *Tendency* to it, nor any
 ‘ *Increase of Officers* proposed, that may endanger the
 ‘ *Liberties of the People*.

I have cited these Passages at large, and in their full Strength, that the *Author* may have no Pretence to complain of Misrepresentation, or a partial State of his Arguments. There is no Occasion to wrest his Words; for He speaks out very plainly, and avows Himself an Advocate for *Excises*, though He is pleased to disclaim the Design of a *general Excise*; but it will soon appear, in the Course of this Enquiry, whether the Practice of turning one Duty after another into *Excises* hath no Tendency to a *general Excise*; and whether *this Method of Taxation* can be long carry’d on, without any *Increase of Officers*, or any Danger to the *Liberties of the People*.

The Gentleman, who answer’d * *this Pamphlet*, made some cursory Observations on the *Scheme of Excises*, as it is laid down in the Passages before cited; but deferr’d the particular Examination of it to a more seasonable Juncture; yet even the few Remarks, which He dropt on this Subject, rouzed up the sage Mr. *Osborne*; who told us, with his usual Solemnity, that *Excises* are so far from being *Badges of Slavery*, that they are the most equitable Methods of raising Taxes; and that *though the Words general Excise, have by foolish Custom a frightful Idea annex’d to them, yet a general Excise is the most reasonable Thing in the World*.

He

* *The Case of the Revival of the SALT DUTY fully stated and consider’d, &c.*

He is pleas'd, indeed, to exclude all the *Necessaries of LIFE, TRADE and MANUFACTORY* from his No-tion of a *general Excise*; nay, He would have it col-lected by the *fewest Number of Officers possible*, who ought not to be permitted to enter into *private Houses*.

— *If This can be contrived, and settled*, says He, a *general Excise will be a national Blessing*. To which I reply, that We have no Objection to *meer Words, or Sounds*, any more than Mr. *Osborne*; and if either *He*, or his *Patron*, who must be acknowledged a very great Master of *Ways and Means*, can find out a *general Tax* to supply all the present Occasions of the Government, without endangering our *Liberties*, or affecting the *Necessaries of Life, Trade and Manufactory*, I am ready to own it a *national Blessing*. But what is all This to the Purpose? Will Mr. *Osborne* pretend to say that the *Salt-Tax*, which gave Occasion to this Dispute, did not affect the *Necessaries of Life*; or will he have the Confidence to assert that the *other Excises*, pleaded for by the *Author of a Letter to a Freeholder*, are of this Nature? No; He manifestly evades the Point in the Paper now before Me, and seems to advance Argu-ments in one Paragraph with no other View, than to knock them down in the next, by throwing in such Restrictions as I have just mention'd. It is, indeed, exactly of a Piece with his other Writings, which discover a Consciousness that He is engaged in a *bad Cause*, by continually shuffling between his Principles, as an *Englishman*, and the Duty of his present Voca-tion, as a *Court-Writer*.

However, this Way of Reasoning, in Favour of *Excises*, is sufficient to give us an Alarm, as it is evidently calculated to prepare us for something of that Nature, and hath induced me to enter imme-diately upon the Examination of a Point, which I apprehend to be of the utmost Consequence to *Great Britain*.

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The Reader will perceive that I design this Paper only by way of Introduction to some following Essays; in which I propose to state the Nature of *Excises*, and shew how they differ from *other Taxes*, with Regard to the general Interest of *Trade* and the *Liberties of the People*. I will likewise enquire into the Origin of *this Method of Taxation*, and by what Means it was first introduced and establish'd amongst us. I will farther endeavour to prove that the *Scheme* now in Dispute tends to the Establishment of such a *general Excise*, as hath been constantly oppos'd in this Nation by all the *great Patrons and Assertors of Liberty*.

To these general Heads I shall occasionally subjoin such Observations on particular Branches of the Argument, as my own Enquiries, the Information of others, or the Objections of my Adversaries may suggest to me, in the Course of this Debate; for I expect to have the whole *Corps of Mercenaries* turn'd loose upon me, in order to confound Truth with Numbers, Clamour and Sophistry; but I am so fully convinced of the Merits of the Cause, that I desire only the Attention of the Publick, and the impartial Judgment of all disinterested Men. I can only add, that as I am resolv'd to spare no Pains in the Illustration of this Point; so my Readers may be assur'd that I will not suffer myself to be diverted from the Pursuit of it by any *personal Scurrilities*, or *Altercations foreign to the Purpose*. D.



SATURDAY,

